

"Secrecy" in the asceticism of St Radegund according to Venantius Fortunatus' Vita

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Abstract

The figure of the saint, as well as the concept of holiness, is one of the central elements in the complex of human values of the Early Middle Ages. The aim of this paper is to identify ways of establishing elements of the Christian cultural model based on the analysis of the ideals of holiness in the texts representing this historical period. To achieve this, the study focuses on the identification of features indicating the perception and understanding of holiness in the Early Middle Ages. The article dwells on the Vita (Life) of a famous Frankish Saint, Radegund, written by a well-known poet and bishop, Venantius Fortunatus, in the late 6th century. Although this author draws upon a standard list of basic monastic virtues of that time, in the rhetoric and imagery he uses to describe the saint's devotion, Fortunatus' text differs from other works of this genre in the Early Middle Ages in many ways. The main aim of this report is to determine how the author's personality, his inner intentions and self-interest affected the creation of this hagiographic image of the saint. It is in this regard that attention is paid to the topos of "secrecy" in Fortunatus' descriptions of Radegund's ascetic practices. Similar motives for secrecy are not found, either in other Vitae by Fortunatus, or in the spiritual biographies of other holy women of the period compiled by different authors. In our opinion this is largely explained by Fortunatus' personal motives in creating the Vita of St Radegund. The author wanted to show that he knew something that was hidden from others. Thus, the motive of "secret" asceticism is used not only to demonstrate the humility and piety of the saint, but as a way to attract attention to the Vita's author.

Keywords

Asceticism, Baudonivia, Early Middle Ages, Fortunatus, Hagiography, Holiness, Radegund, Sainthood